

Inquiry into engaging parents in the education of their children

Submission

By The



**Early Childhood
Council**

to the

**Committee Secretariat
Education and Science
Parliament Buildings
Wellington**

**Inquiry into engaging parents in the education of
their children**

11 November 2013

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SUBMISSION BY THE EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

1. The Early Childhood Council (ECC) would like to make a submission on the Inquiry into engaging parents in the education of their children.
2. As the largest representative body of quality, licensed early childhood centres in New Zealand, the ECC want assurance that the inquiry will utilise its function as a representative body of quality teacher led, centre based ECE services and its best practice examples of working effectively with parents, families, whanau, aiga, and communities to contribute to their children's education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. **The Early Childhood Council recommends that the inquiry will:**
 - a. note that the involvement of parents in quality early childhood education is fundamental,
 - b. utilise the ECC's membership made up of 1,000 quality, licensed early childhood centres in New Zealand, many who can provide some evidence-based suggestions for engaging parents and communities in their children's education,
 - c. draw upon the growing body of literature that supports strengths based approaches to working with children and families and acknowledges the concept of an equal partnership between parents and teachers rather than teachers being viewed as always knowing what is best for children,
 - d. consider the effectiveness of the ECC's Partnering with Parents initiative, as a way of engaging parents in the education of their children,
 - e. explore how funding and regulatory structures can support communities with high needs and may be best serviced by community hubs that offer a wrap around service,
 - f. explore the use of technology to involve parents (such as internet-based portfolios).

DISCUSSION

Inquiry into engaging parents in the education of their children

4. The ECC supports the terms of reference for the Inquiry. The ECC purport is that the foundations for success in literacy and numeracy are laid down in early childhood through realising *Te Whāriki* in action. One of its guiding principles of family and community, emphasise the need for teachers to build on the strengths of a child's home life.
5. When ECE centres involve parents, find out about a family's values, cultural practices, the child's interests and needs, and build these into the daily programme, parents and children feel valued. This creates trust and children ultimately benefit.
6. The ECC's close relationship with a large proportion of New Zealand's childcare sector makes the ECC an integral contributor to the inquiry into engaging parents in the education of their children.

Links to Theory

- ‘Outcomes of Early childhood Education: Literature Review – Ministry of Education, L Mitchell, C. Wylie and M. Carr, New Zealand Council for Educational Research’, states:
 - *‘There were greater cognitive and learning disposition gains for children, and reduced antisocial/worried behaviour, in centres that encouraged parents to be involved in their children’s learning, with a focus on educational aims.’*
- ‘Improving the Transition – Reducing Social and Psychological Morbidity During Adolescence – A report from the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor’; Sir Peter Gluckman’s says:
 - *‘Government should be cognisant of the social and economic importance of a smooth transition from childhood to adulthood, and of the importance of the family/whanau and broader social context to this transition.’*

Diversity

7. New Zealand’s growing ethnic diversity is creating a more pressing need to address the gap between home and school. A study by John Dickie, ‘Proclaiming the good news, Samoan children, church literacy and comprehension’, talks about Pacific students generally having lower levels of reading comprehension than Pakeha students. He says this may be due to having different home and school languages, or it may be because of different expectations in these students’ school and out of school literacy experiences.
8. Professor Claire McLachlan says that research shows the family is a powerful force for literacy learning across social and cultural groups (Anderson & Morrison, 2011). Morrow (2009) states that family literacy is a complex concept, but includes some of the following features:
 - It encompasses the ways families, children and extended family use literacy.
 - It occurs naturally during the routines of daily living such as making lists, writing letters, sharing stories, and through reading, writing or talking.
 - It may be initiated purposefully or spontaneously as families go about their lives.
 - It reflects the ethnic, racial or cultural heritage of the family.
 - It may be initiated by the school such as story book reading, writing or helping with homework.
 - It can involve families going to school for concerts, parent-teacher conferences and programmes that children participate in.
 - It can include parents helping with reading, observing classes, sharing hobbies or talking at mat times in the classroom.
 - Parents involved in workshops designed to help them learn about and understand what they can do at home to help their children.
9. McLachlan states, “Research shows that differences between the literacies of the home and children’s knowledge base and the education setting mean that some children are disadvantaged in educational settings where their literacy experiences are not valued or recognised (Cairney, 2003; Wasik & Hindman, 2010)”.

Strength Based Models

10. There is a growing body of literature that is being taken up by many non-governmental agencies that work with children and families to base their practice frameworks on variants of the strengths perspective. One of these is found in Sanders, J., Munford, R., (2010), *Working with Families – Strengths-based approaches*, Dunmore Publishing Ltd, Wellington.
11. The Children's Commissioner's working paper, '*Parents', Families' and Whanau Contributions to Educational Success*' recommends a good approach is to **start early** in a child's life, be **strengths-based** and recognise the **expertise of parents and whanau**.

Partnering with Parents' Initiative

12. Partnering with Parents is led by the ECC in partnership the Ministry of Social Development's (MSD) Strategies with Kids, Information for Parents (S.K.I.P) team, and Plunket. Its aim is to bring parents and early childhood (ECE) centre staff together, with health professionals and family support workers to answer the question, '*How can we best work together to support the children we all care for?*'
13. Partnering with Parents is unique in that it is in an ECE setting, is designed to be of low or no cost to parents and early childhood centres, and is based on building positive equal relationships between parents and early childhood teachers, rather than focusing on perceived negative behaviour of children or their parents.
14. Embedded into the Partnering with Parents philosophy is the belief that we need more confident parents, not ones who feel their experience or knowledge is inferior, that the family is the most important support group for the child, and that the child learns best when their family and teachers work in partnership to support the child's developmental learning.
15. Partnering with Parents has now been piloted in 13 ECE centres in different locations across New Zealand and participated in by approximately 200 parents and 100 teachers. Feedback from those who have attended said it gave them a whole new appreciation of how it would feel to be in the shoes of the other person i.e. a teacher referring to a parent, and also that it built stronger relationships between parents and children.
16. Partnering with Parents acts as a precursor to other parenting programmes. It also develops stronger local support networks including utilising available resources such as SKIP.
17. The ECC would welcome the opportunity to give an oral submission also about the Partnering with Parents initiative.

Bright Sparks Childcare, Mangere

18. Bright Sparks Childcare in Mangere, Auckland, hosted a Partnering with Parents programme early in 2013. The centre is in an area with high numbers of Pasifika, Maori and lower socio economic families. A Bright Sparks representative spoke at the ECC National Conference in June this year about their involvement with Partnering with Parents and the centre's commitment to reflecting the at home experiences of children in their everyday practices. They go to a lot of effort to connect with parents including liaising with local businesses to help parents of children find employment.

19. They consider themselves a mainstream centre but are inspired by Christian and Reggio Emilia philosophy. They are an example of a centre, who by better connecting with parents, are overcoming socio economic and other factors, to ensure better educational outcomes for children.

Community Hubs

20. More recently, a fresh and community-oriented model has emerged designed to maximise the involvement of parents in their child's educational experience at early childhood level. Called the "Community Hubs" model, a range of social and support services are offered from the one location including an early childcare facility.
21. Evidence suggests these community hubs may be best established in lower socio-economic communities where the benefits of the child's participation in quality early childhood education are complimented by the parent's participation in their child's educational journey as well as involvement in other educational and support experiences.
22. In New Zealand, the ECC is aware of an increasing interest in the provision of community hub-style services. The examples below are based on a well known community hub model known as the "Pen Green Model", <http://childrenscentre.pengreen.org/about-pen-green/>

<p>Te Aroha Noa Community Services 12-28 Brentwood Avenue Palmerston North 4412 Phone: 06 358 2259 Email: eccrachel@tearohanao.org.nz Website: www.tearohanao.org.nz</p>	<p>Living & Learning Foundation Mangere 6 Bicknell Road Mangere, Auckland 2024 Tel: +64 9 275 3666 Fax: +64 9 275 5766 mangere@livingandlearning.org.nz</p> <p>Henderson 212 Universal Drive Henderson, Auckland 0610 Tel: +64 9 837 7992 henderson@livingandlearning.org.nz</p> <p>Support Office 60 Greville Road Albany, Auckland 0632 Tel: +64 9 479 9922 Fax: +64 9 479 9924 familycentres@livingandlearning.org.nz</p>
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23. It should be noted that not all community hubs need to be based on physical locations. Current interest in the establishment of virtual community hubs is also growing. One of the fundamental keys to the development of a successful community hub service is the early involvement of the local community and a sense of "community ownership" of the hub.
24. Our experience is that this community-ownership sits comfortably alongside what is frequently a privately-owned childcare service, ensuring a successful commercial model with appropriate governance and management practices.

25. The ECE network could be better used to positively engage with parents across a wide spectrum. The community hub approach is about engaging parents, families, whanau, aiga, and communities meaningfully in early childhood education, seeing early childhood centres as hubs for their community and creating scaffolding services that support healthy whanau. This holistic way of delivering services has resulted in many parents understanding their role in supporting their child in education.

ICT/social media and Internet-based portfolios

26. The ECC's membership have many great stories about how they are positively and safely using ICT/social media and internet based portfolios as a way of connecting with parents, families, whanau, aiga, and communities in their children's education.
27. The winners of the ECC – Telecom Innovation and Improvement Award 2013, went to Dr Darius and Nikeeta Singh who own and operate two centres, Fern Garden Preschool and Childcare in Tauranga, and Magic Kingdom Childcare and Early Learning Centre in Auckland. They developed '*Learning Roots and Shoots*', a visual online representation of education inputs and learning outputs as achieved against the NZ ECE Curriculum.
28. Families who access this tool can securely access to their child's learning tree online, which holds all learning stories and learning outcomes ever documented about their child from 0-5 years in the form of colour coded roots, branches and leaves. Parents can click any leaf to open the full story that showcases the identified attribute. The core objective of this innovation is to establish strong partnerships between centre and home, and to create meaningful communication and deeper engagement between parents and teachers. Progress of the project was communicated at regular intervals and opportunity was given for parents to up-skill their awareness and use of electronic information sharing in order to support their ability to interact with the project.
29. Since launching the online tool, there has been a significant surge in email correspondence by parents together with anecdotal feedback from teachers of longer and deeper discussions during drop off and pick up times. With the rise of cell phone ownership and availability of downloadable applications, these types of IT methods could be very useful for overcoming reported cases of 'shy' parents who feel more comfortable connecting with staff electronically than face to face.
30. Brian Peurling, author and spokesperson on 'teaching in the digital age', was a keynote speaker at the ECC's 2013 annual conference in June. He said that, "Parents and families have fears but that we need to be explicit about what these opportunities are that we are providing." An example is the use of blogging as a way to communicate with families. Blogging provides an opportunity to share the thought and intention behind the learning experiences. This helps families to better understand their child's growth, development, learning and contribution to centre community.
31. There are many other examples of internet based portfolios available to ECE centres such as Educa, New Zealand's leading online portfolio provider offering a secure and easy to use website for busy parents and far away relatives who can provide instant feedback after enjoying learning stories, photos and videos. Children are also able to read their learning stories on an ipad just like a book.

32. The ECC urge the select committee to look into these innovative ways to connect with parents, families, whanau, aiga, and communities to contribute to their children's education.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL

The Early Childhood Council (ECC) was formed in 1990 from the amalgamation of the Licensed Childcare Centres Federation and the Associated Childcare Council. It became an officially incorporated society in 1991.

The ECC is the largest representative body of quality, licensed early childhood centres in New Zealand. We have more than 1,000 member centres, 30% of which are community-owned and 70% of which are privately-owned. Our membership employs thousands of teachers, and educates tens of thousands of children. We have Pasifika and Maori members, Christian, Montessori and Steiner, and many with no special affiliation. We believe families have the right to choose from this educational diversity that which they believe is best for their own children.

Our member centres range from ten child places to over 150 child places and are spread throughout the country. Membership is voluntary, and open to all licensed independent early childhood centres.

We offer members up-to-the-minute information, support and advice as well as representing their views with those who influence our sector.